

Legislative Days 36-38
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Session Week 10 Legislative Report



Georgia Society
of Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery

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GOVERNMENT
RELATIONS

Week 10, Legislative Days 36-38

This week marked the culmination of legislative days 36, 37, and 38, taking place on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, respectively, with a committee work day on Tuesday. As the Georgia General Assembly enters the final stretch of its second session for the 23-24 biennial, days 39 and 40, scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday of next week, will signify the end of the session on SINE DIE. With the clock ticking, legislators have been working tirelessly, often into long hours, to address a myriad of bills and issues before the session concludes. Notably, this week saw the conclusion of Senate committees for the year, with all Senate committee final reports submitted by noon on Thursday, March 21st. As the Assembly wraps up its work, the focus this week has shifted to key priority issues including debates surrounding sports betting, Medicaid expansion, and the finalization of the FY 25 budget. As the General Assembly enters its final days, the coming week will undoubtedly be critical in shaping the state's legislative landscape for the foreseeable future.



Appropriations Overview

During the Senate Appropriations meeting regarding HB 916, the FY 25 Georgia State Budget, several key points emerged. Notably, the budget was set at \$1.5 billion less than the Adjusted Fiscal Year 24 budget, indicating a significant reduction in financial allocations. However, amidst these reductions, the Senate echoed the House's proposal for pay raises for state employees, ensuring consistency in this aspect of the budget. The House had initially allocated \$22 million for Superior Court Judges, the Senate opted to leave a significant portion of this untouched and in the budget.. Crucially, funding for essential areas such as school safety grants and school bus resources remained intact in the Senate's version of the budget, emphasizing the continued commitment to education and student welfare. Additionally, the Senate notably doubled the proposed increase in the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, reflecting a heightened focus on supporting families and childcare initiatives. However, differences emerged in certain allocations between the House and Senate. While the House had proposed an increase in funding for the Secretary of State (SOS) specifically for ballot machines, the Senate did not match this increase, suggesting differing perspectives on the allocation of resources in this area. Moreover, an innovative efficiency measure was proposed by the Senate, aiming to streamline resources by combining the costs for dyslexia and literacy screeners through the utilization of the same screening tools for both purposes. Furthermore, the Senate marked a significant \$6 million allocation for the State Trauma Care Commission, underscoring the importance placed on healthcare and emergency services within the budget. Ultimately, despite these variations and deliberations, the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously passed a motion to approve HB 916.

Healthcare Legislation

Senate Floor

On March 18th, HB 502, known as the "Georgia Cosmetic Laser Services Act," successfully passed the Senate floor. This bill aimed to amend certain provisions related to requirements for applicants seeking assistant laser practitioner licenses, thereby refining regulations within the cosmetic laser services industry. The proposed revisions likely focused on enhancing standards for licensure to ensure the safe and competent practice of cosmetic laser procedures. With its passage, HB 502 signifies the legislature's commitment to upholding rigorous standards in the field of cosmetic laser services, prioritizing consumer safety and professional competency.

On March 21st, the House agreed to the Senate substitute on HB 1339 concerning Certificate of Need (CON). However, they introduced a new amendment during this process, reinstating construction caps in the bill while excluding equipment caps. Additionally, the House removed the multi-specialty language from the legislation, a move aimed at protecting hospitals from potential threats. Following these adjustments, the bill was promptly transmitted to the Senate floor for a final agreement later that day. With its passage in both chambers, HB 1339 is now en route to the governor's office.

House Regulated Industries Special Subcommittee

During the special subcommittee of the House Regulated Industries committee, SB 460 was presented once again by Sen. Clint Dixon. This bill aims to revise the number of advanced practice registered nurses and physician assistants that a physician can authorize and supervise simultaneously, and this was the fourth attempt to get the bill passed in committee this session after three failed attempts. The bill failed again by one vote, but a discrepancy arose when a non-committee member legislator substituted for another absent committee member who ended up attending late, resulting in both voting against the bill. This caused its failure by one vote. Sen. Brass argued that since one vote didn't count due to the presence of the original committee member, it should be considered a tie, and he suggested the bill be reconsidered in full committee, as technically a tie vote could advance the bill. The Regulated Industries Committee chairman chose not to hear the bill in full committee.

House Health Committee

On March 18th, the House Health Committee convened to discuss two important legislative measures. Firstly, SB 505, sponsored by Senator Blake Tillery, aimed to revise provisions regarding the required publication of certain financial documents by hospitals on their websites. This bill passed without any questions or opposition from committee members. Secondly, HR 1360, presented by Representative Katie Dempsey, proposed the establishment of a House Study Committee on Alternatives to Opioids for Pain Management. The committee exhibited strong support for efforts to combat opioid-related deaths, underscoring the seriousness of the opioid crisis. HR 1360 passed with unanimous approval from the committee, reflecting their commitment to exploring alternative strategies for pain management to mitigate the detrimental effects of opioid misuse and addiction.

Senate Insurance Committee

On March 20th, the Senate Insurance meeting considered and voted on two significant bills. The first bill, HB 451 introduced by Rep. Seabaugh, focused on providing supplemental, illness-specific insurance for certain first responders grappling with occupational post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This bill aimed to mandate the provision of such insurance coverage, recognizing the unique challenges and mental health strains faced by first responders in the line of duty. Following deliberations, HB 451 was passed. The second bill under review was HB 945, presented by Rep. Hawkins. This bill aimed to address a critical issue in the State employees' health insurance plan, specifically concerning protection for covered individuals when an in-network hospital transitions to out-of-network status before the end of the plan year. HB 945 sought to provide safeguards for individuals enrolled in the state insurance plan, ensuring continuity of coverage and mitigating potential financial burdens associated with unexpected changes in network status. After thorough consideration, HB 945 also passed, highlighting the Senate's dedication to safeguarding the interests and health care needs of state employees.

Senate Regulated Industries Committee

On March 21st, the Senate Regulated Industries Committee engaged in a nearly three-hour debate surrounding two significant bills. The first bill, HB 1322 introduced by Rep. Cannon, pertained to the Georgia Hemp Farming Act, aiming to regulate consumable hemp products. A substitute bill was proposed during the session, which included a provision limiting consumable hemp products to 10 mg per edible and a total of 100 mg per package of product. Lengthy discussions ensued regarding the potential risks associated with higher concentrations of THC in these products, particularly concerning the safety of children and pets. Despite efforts to find a consensus, disagreements persisted, particularly from Georgia hemp industry representatives who argued that the packaging limitation substitute could harm their industry. Ultimately, due to the lack of agreement, the committee decided to table the bill. The second bill debated was HB 1077, by Rep. Cooper, concerning the Georgia Board of Health Care Workforce and the creation of a grant program to fund additional behavioral health workforce training positions. During the deliberations, Sen. David Lucas introduced language advocating for Medicaid expansion, aimed at closing the coverage gap in Georgia for individuals who are currently uninsured but cannot afford private insurance. The committee heard compelling public testimony from Georgia constituents and advocacy coalitions in favor of Medicaid expansion, highlighting the significant coverage gap in the state. Despite initially passing by a single vote, Chairman Cowsert unexpectedly inserted his vote against the bill, resulting in a tie and subsequently halting the advancement of the bill. This decision underscored the complexities and divisions surrounding the issue of Medicaid expansion in Georgia.

GSDDS Legislation

<i>Bill</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Status</i>
HB 502 (Rep. Deborah Silcox)	Georgia Cosmetic Laser Services Act; revise a definition; revise a provision	House passed, Senate passed
HB 1046 (Rep. David Clark)	advanced practice registered nurses and physician assistants to order home healthcare services; substitute introduced with language from SB 102 (that died in committee) allowing CRNAs to administer anesthesia without direct physician oversight in rural hospitals	House passed, Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee favorably reported by substitute
HB 1264 (Rep. Ron Stephens)	Professions and businesses; establish a professional health program to provide for monitoring and rehabilitation of impaired healthcare professionals; authorize	House passed, Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities favorably reported by substitute
HB 1322 (Rep. Chas Cannon)	Georgia Hemp Farming Act; regulate consumable hemp products	House passed, Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities
HB 1326 (Rep. Ron Stephens)	Crimes and offenses; Schedule I, Schedule III, and Schedule IV controlled substances; provide certain provisions	House passed, Senate passed
SB 495 (Sen. Sam Watson)	Low THC Oil Patient Registry; term of validity of a registration card; provide	Senate passed, House Regulated Industries Committee favorably reported